

WORKSHOP: DRAWING PLANS

An article by Daniel Jödemann

Translated by Aelyn

ANNOTATIONS BY THE TRANSLATOR

This is a translation of an article written by German illustrator & author Daniel Jödemann about a workshop he held on a convention named *Hannover Spielt!* in 2006. I tried to stay as faithful to the original as possible, only sometimes omitting references to Das Schwarze Auge (the role-playing-game Jödemann often works for). I am told that an English version of DSA exists, called TDE (The Dark Eye), but I'm not sure how familiar people are with it. If you are interested in finding out more about Jödemann's work or DSA, check out the following websites:

 [Daniel Jödemann](#)

 [DSA-Wiki](#)

You'll find my annotations to be marked in []. All other brackets are original to the text. I also included the handout provided by Jödemann, but added English labels. For those who are not interested in the whole summary of the workshop, I also created a special short summary of Jödemann's technique and tips (some of them taken from my own experience as well), to be found at the end.

I hope this improves your mapmaking as it improved mine. Feel free to comment on it, especially if you find any major language mistakes. I'm no native speaker of English, so please correct me if something sounds completely askew to you. Enjoy!

INTRODUCTION BY THE AUTHOR

For *Hannover Spielt! 2006* I accepted an interesting challenge: A workshop about **drawing plans**, designed to give interested participants some tips and tricks to take along. Since there had probably never been anything similar, I myself was curious to see how well the workshop would be received by the attendees.

With this article I want to provide a summary and review of the workshop. My intended audience are those who wish to produce their own plans for their contest entries [referring to several German role-playing adventure contests such as *Gänsekiel&Tastenschlag*], so hopefully some will take useful tips with them.

Besides, I want to present four sketches made by participants of my workshop as well as the handout I had prepared for the workshop.

THE PROJECT

My workshop was scheduled for Saturday morning, so it became my first agenda item of the convention as well. I was armed with a folder containing sketches and plans and a bunch of drawing implements, trying to clarify the matter with visual aids, examples and team development of ideas.

Of course the aim of my workshop was not to teach people how to draw – first because it's nearly impossible to achieve that in only two hours (and certainly impossible for me), second because I don't think it is necessary to teach someone how to draw for them to produce presentable plans.

I myself have some experience in drawing [*he's a trained designer and quit his studies in architecture halfway*] and in making plans for *Das Schwarze Auge*: My debut was featured in *Angroschs Kinder* (map of Xorlosch), being my debut as an author at the same time. It was followed by plans such featured in *Karawanenspuren* (Port Kellis, Selem et al.), *Basargeschichten* (Al'Ahabad et al.), all of *Kar Domadrosch, Vermächtnis der Völker* (Gerasim) and many more.

Being a judge on the jury of *Goldener Becher 2006* I had seen many plans, some of them very good ones. Apart from wanting to improve the quality of plans handed in for the contests, I decided to do the workshop because many people had asked about how I made my plans (my favourite question being "what program is it you use anyway?"). And above all, one reason was the enthusiasm for maps and plans that had come along with me

becoming a role-player: maps of dungeons, palaces and dragon treasures that can be explored by the gamers have forever been part of role-playing-games.

Last but not least, maps tend to be sidelined: When a new adventure or rulebook is published, all the attention goes to the cover, then the illustrations, and then to the content itself. Usually plans are only mentioned if there are too few. At least I have never seen a criticism saying “The Avenue of Al’Ahabad is way too narrow” or “The temple of Rondra is by far too close to the inner city”. But maybe that’s just a sign of how good the maps and plans made for DSA are...

SETTLEMENTS AND DUNGEONS

For my workshop I had divided plans into two categories:

The first one I termed **settlements**, containing adventure sites drawn in top view such as cities, towns, bivouacs, and military forts, where heroes can walk around freely. The other one I simply called **dungeons**. They differ from the first category since they are usually explored room by room with a weapon in your hand, like a black mage’s secret hideout (you open a door, kill the monster, loot the treasures, and go to the next room). I also included any other kind of buildings in this category since they are more or less explored in the same manner.

My workshop focussed on the second category, dungeons, for an author or illustrator is far more likely to be confronted with this kind of plan. In the case of DSA, maps of most cities and even minor towns already exist, but there are hundreds or thousands of wizard towers, keeps, castles, smuggler hideouts, and dragon treasures out there waiting to be mapped.

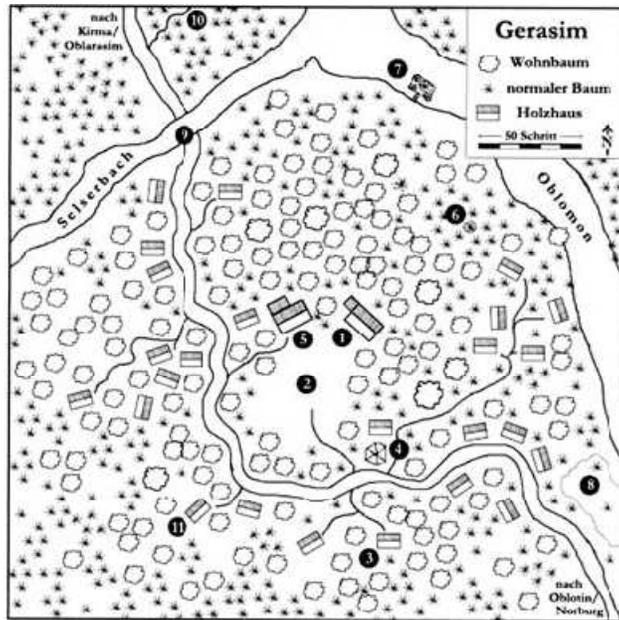
The participants and I collected examples of dungeons during the workshop. They were then asked to choose one example and work on a sketch, which wasn’t supposed to be very high-standard or even finished by the end of the workshop. (For results check the chapter “Participants’ Sketches”)

FROM IDEA TO PLAN

Using some examples I tried to explain how a plan comes into existence. The techniques and methods I used are of course my very own, so I can only speak on my own behalf. To point out the whole process of plan making this article contains reduced versions of sketches made for a specific job, namely the map of Gerasim drawn for *Das Vermächtnis der Völker*, an adventure by Katharina Pietsch featured in *Aus Licht und Traum*.

After I accept a bid, I start by collecting **information**: If the job is about a map of a city for which a description exists, of course I consult that description. But I also use other source

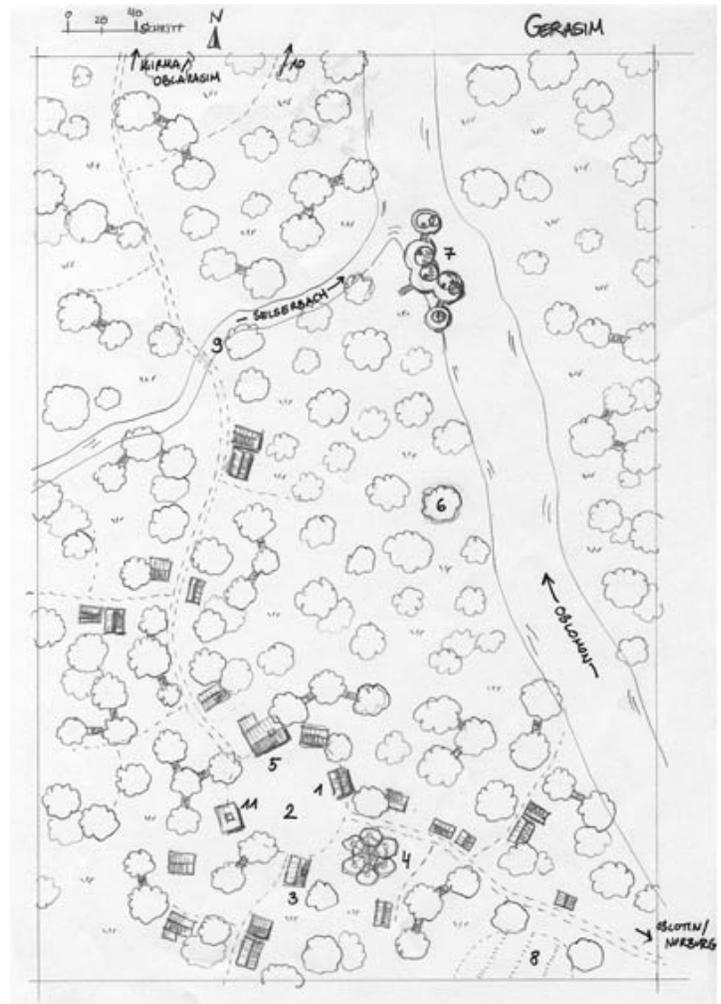
texts that contain information such as the architectural style of the region. However if the job is a plan of a dungeon, the adventure text itself is most important. Sometimes the author even provides you with a draft (as was the case with Gerasim).



The author's draft of Gerasim

Then I make some first **sketches** (pencil on paper), mainly to get all the information provided by the text and to interpret it in a way that fits the map.

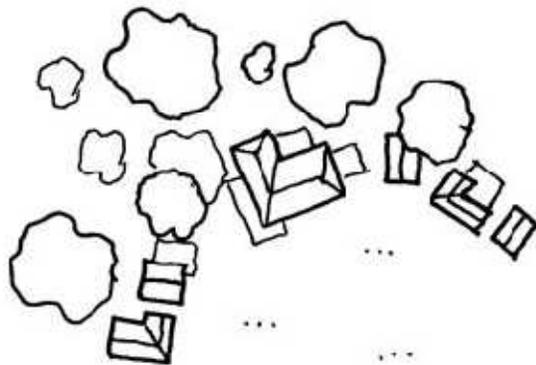
With the help of these sketches I now make a **preparatory drawing** that can be shown to the author/editor.



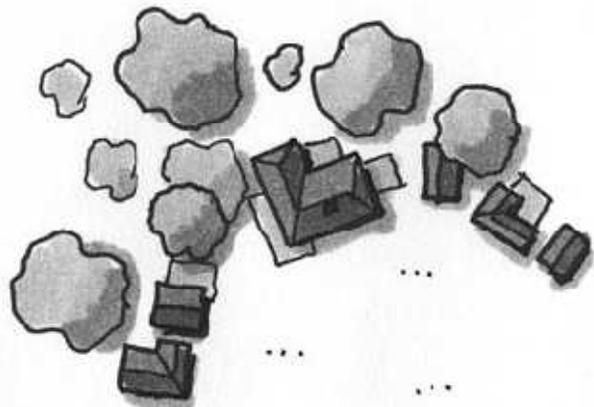
After adjustments by the author I draw a **model** using a pencil. This already contains the future size of the plan (half a page, a whole page) as well as the map scale. I can make use of grids and reference lines since this is only the model. And I avail myself of a little designer's trick I like to use: Always make a drawing bigger than it is supposed to be. Small mistakes and asymmetries simply vanish when the plan is reduced later on. So I make the model about one and a half to two times the size.

The actual **plan** will be drawn on layout paper above the model – this kind of paper works well with the kind of markers I use and is so thin the pencil lines can be seen well enough.

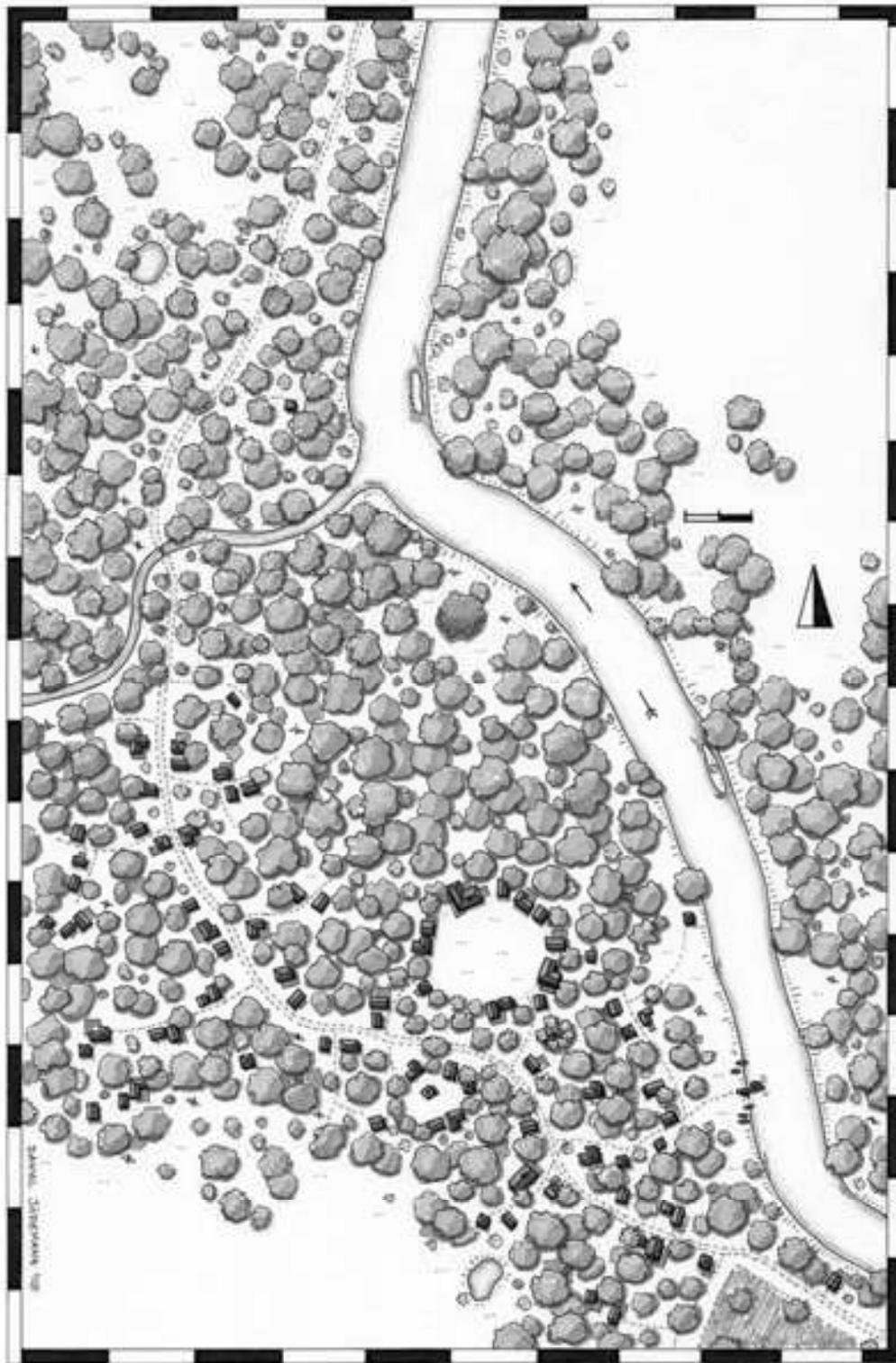
First you draw the lines using several finepens of different sizes.



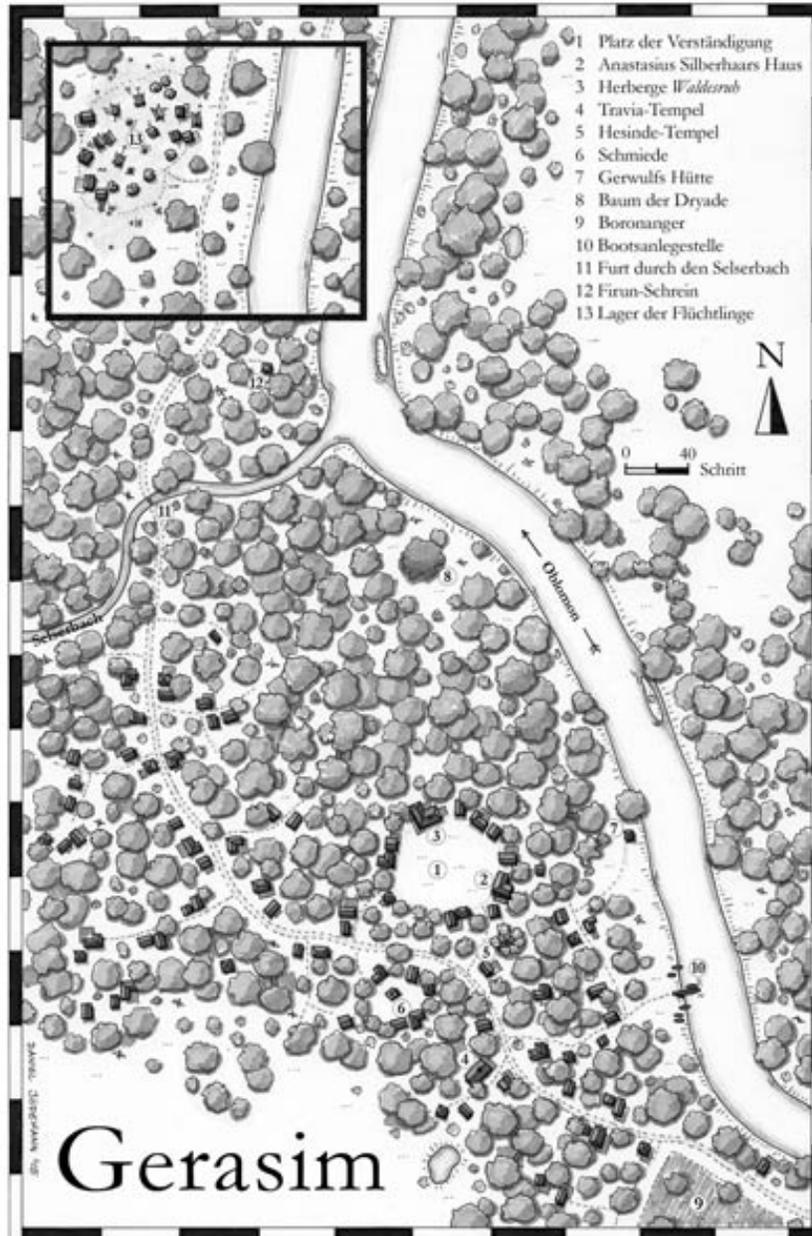
Then you create the shading and graduation using markers. I rarely make use of rulers or templates (as in the model) but rather draw the lines free-hand. This gives the plan a natural look.



Afterwards, you scan the plan in grey-scale mode.



Then comes the **post-editing**: minor retouching, cutting, and of course the labelling are done digitally.



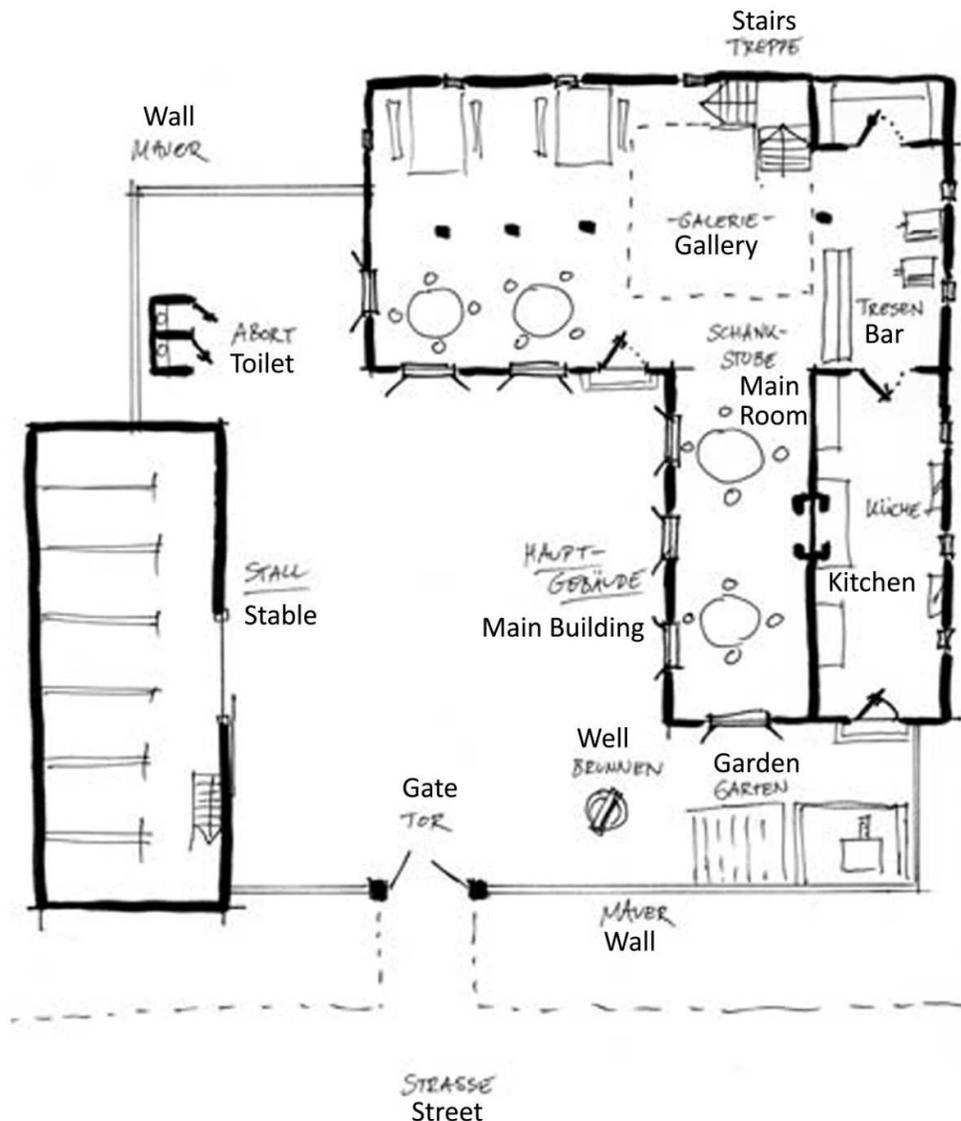
The finished plan is send via email to FanPro and will soon be in print.

TO PLAN A PLAN

To me, the most important aspect of making a plan is planning it, something which should take place before drawing the plan (during the creation of the adventure at best). Once again I came up with two categories:

Considerations of Logic I called everything that deals with the normal usage of the place regardless of the heroes that might come along one day. **Considerations of Dramaturgy** on the other hand are directly connected to the aims of the adventure itself.

To make this point clear, I went with a simple setting of an inn in which the heroes will be attacked by a group of mercenaries. Together with the participants I created a plan of this dungeon.



Concerning **logic** we considered:

- ☉ The inn is located in the wilderness, making it necessary for the buildings to be arranged in a way they are well-fortified and provide shelter against wind, weather, and whatever may come out of the wilderness.
- ☉ To the street however the inn is open, for it has to appear welcoming in order to attract guests.
- ☉ The routes had to be as short as possible: From gate to stable, from kitchen to well etc.
- ☉ The windows facing the courtyard are big and inviting, but small like loopholes on the outside.
- ☉ The bar, the entrance and the stairs are all arranged in a way so that the barkeeper can always keep track who enters and leaves his bar.
- ☉ The fireplace is located between the kitchen and the bar room so it can be used both as a means of cooking and heating. And it will keep at least two rooms on the first floor warm for which higher prices can be charged.

Now coming to **dramaturgy**:

- ☉ Windows and tables are arranged in a way so that the heroes can always look at the courtyard and therefore see the attacking mercenaries.
- ☉ The outer windows are too small for someone to enter, and apart from them the inn has only two entrances. This provides an opportunity for the heroes to entrench themselves in the inn.
- ☉ The heroes certainly won't expect their stay at the inn to be the beginning of an adventure. If the GM wishes to give them a hint at the upcoming attack, a trick is needed: In our case, the toilet was placed in the courtyard so a hero needing to relieve himself might be able to detect suspicious movements outside the inn.
- ☉ If the GM wishes for a wild skirmish to take place in the inn, the main room should provide enough furniture that can go to pieces or even a gallery for a real cloak-and-sword-fight on the stairs (including the falling chandelier, of course)

All of this shows that planning the plan already while writing the adventure is enormously helpful.

Tips

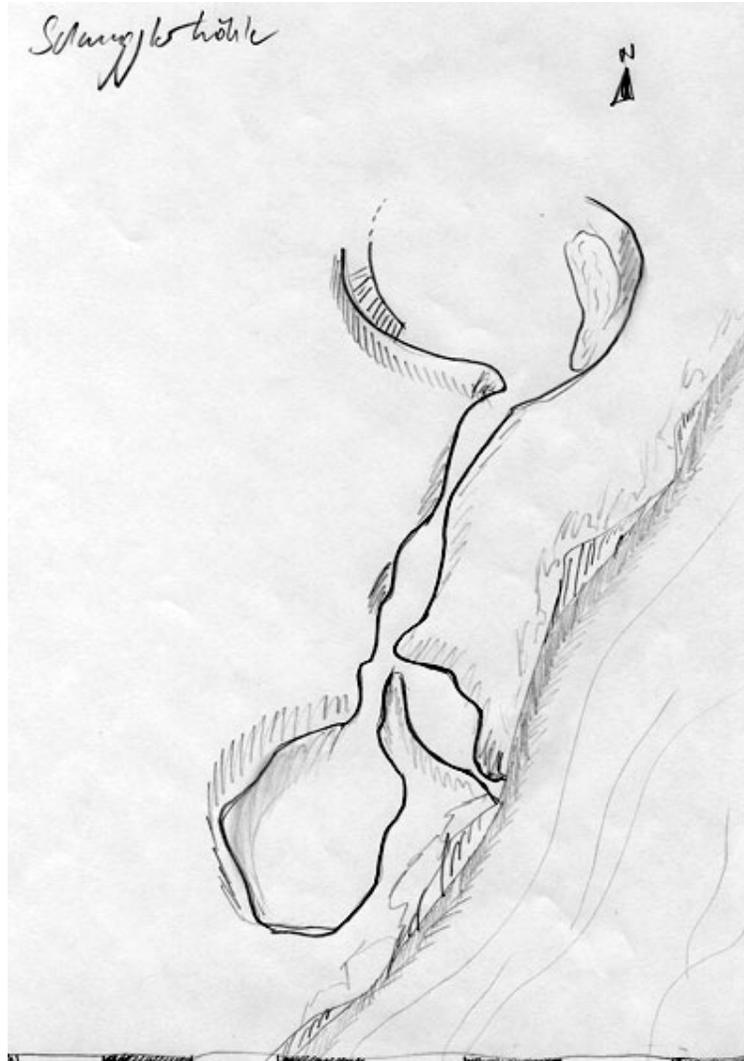
Now I sketched some elements that are typical of dungeon plans in fantasy. [\[Check the handout at the end\]](#)

- The most important tip: **copy!** You'll learn most by looking at existing plans and finding out how others have solved the problem.
- Making plans requires very few **implements**: Pencil and paper are enough. For varying line thickness I recommend different finepens (essentially 0,5mm, 0,3mm and 0,1mm are enough). Finepens also create more contrast than pencils, which might come in handy if you want to scan the plan.
- No plan should lack a **scale** and a **north arrow**. They are especially useful for contest adventures with limited word numbers for they supersede long descriptions. But a scale should never be neglected to maintain a sense of reason in the plans. A dining hall of 1,5x7 meters makes no sense, as does a hall 6 meters of width (unless it's in a royal palace or a troll's lair). If you don't wish to get lost, either put quad paper under your drawing or draw the model onto quad paper. This is easier than creating a different scale and measuring everything by hand.
- A **floorplan** is a top view of a building, a dungeon etc. for which the roof/next floor has been taken away so that only walls, doors, and windows remain visible.
- Varying **line thickness** can be helpful for orientation as well: Thin lines represented everything close to the floor (rugs, stools, stairs etc.), medium lines show elevated objects and obstacles (tables, cupboards, windows, handrails and so on), whereas thick lines clearly are things like walls, doors, shutters or boundaries in the case of underground dungeons.
- The same holds true for **wall thickness** issues: You don't need a degree in statics to know that bearing walls have to be thicker than others. Exterior walls should clearly be thicker than interior walls.
- For dungeons, underground corridors or basements, in order to show the **distinction between the hallway and soil**, just hachure along the boundary lines.
- **Architectural symbols** (for doors, windows, cupboards and such) often don't seem very charming, and many viewers won't be familiar with them, so they aren't helpful. Sometimes however they are useful to show things that are above the cutting plane: Continuations of stairs or trap doors in the ceiling for example. They are usually depicted by dashed lines. An arrow showing the direction of stairs (always from bottom to top) is also rather understandable and useful.
- In order to make your plan look more **vivid**, make use of shading, implied grain on wood, implied floor tiles, and minor details like pebbles lying about.

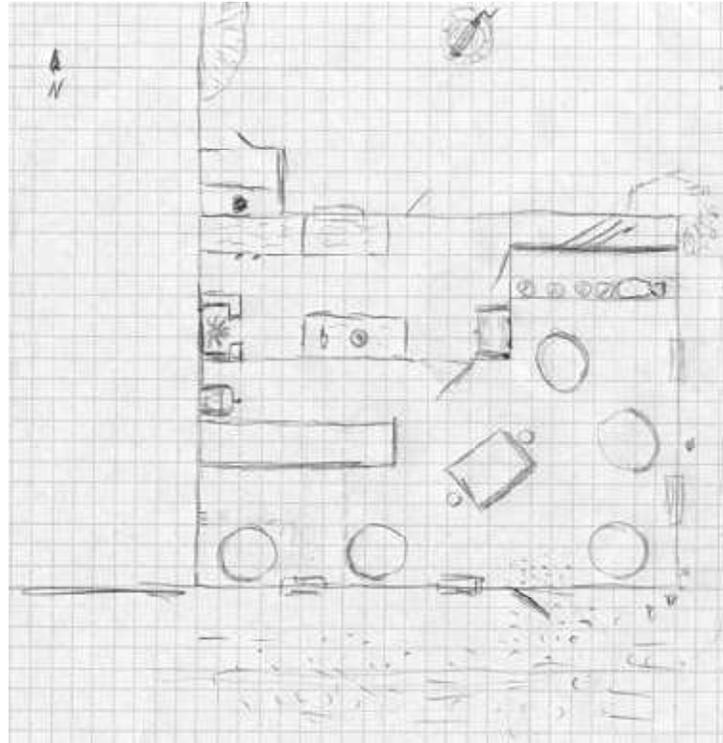
PARTICIPANTS' SKETCHES

Last but not least I want to present some of the sketches done by participants of the workshop.

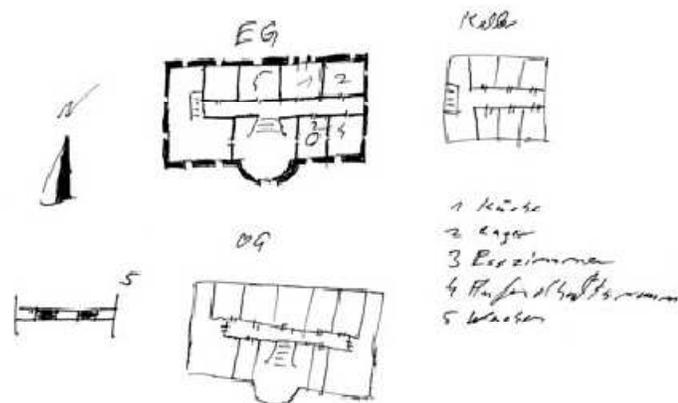
- © A **smuggler's cave** done by Dorothea Fallbusch: Natural grottos at a rocky coast. The smugglers have carved stairs into the stone (or did they find it when they arrived?) – the viewer may envision where they lead, and then let his heroes explore it.



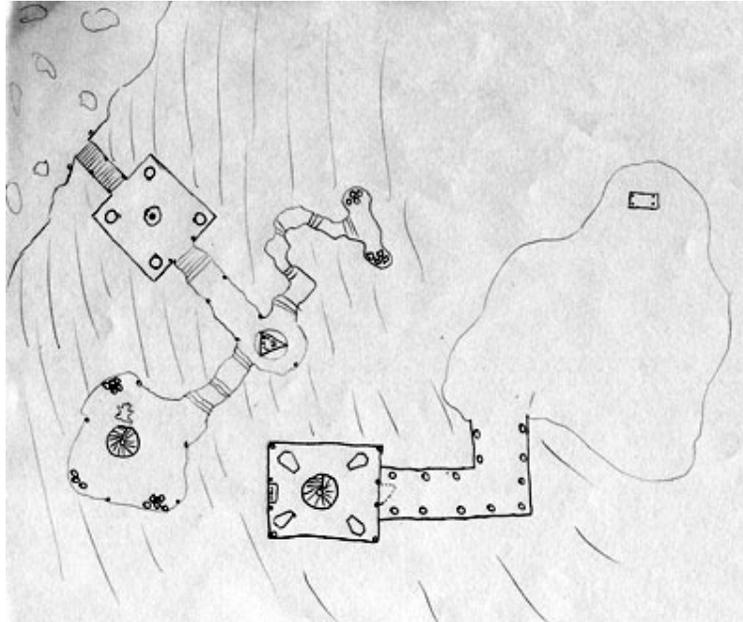
- © A **tavern** by Rüdiger Freiboth: A fully furnished bar complete with kitchen, storage room, as well as toilet and well on the courtyard behind the building. In this sleazy place, the heroes might meet a quest giver who in this cramped room soon ends up with a dagger in his back...



- © A **villa** located somewhere in the realm of Horas or Garethien, anonymous creator: In the lobby there is a perron leading to a gallery on the first floor. The hallways are in the middle so that every room borders the exterior walls and therefore receives enough sunlight. On the first floor there are ample rooms perfectly fit for a fancy dress party – and amidst all this the heroes uncovering a scheme amongst the nobles...



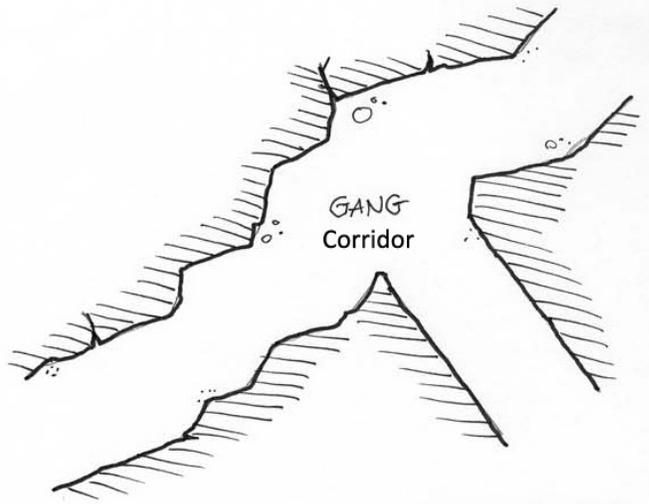
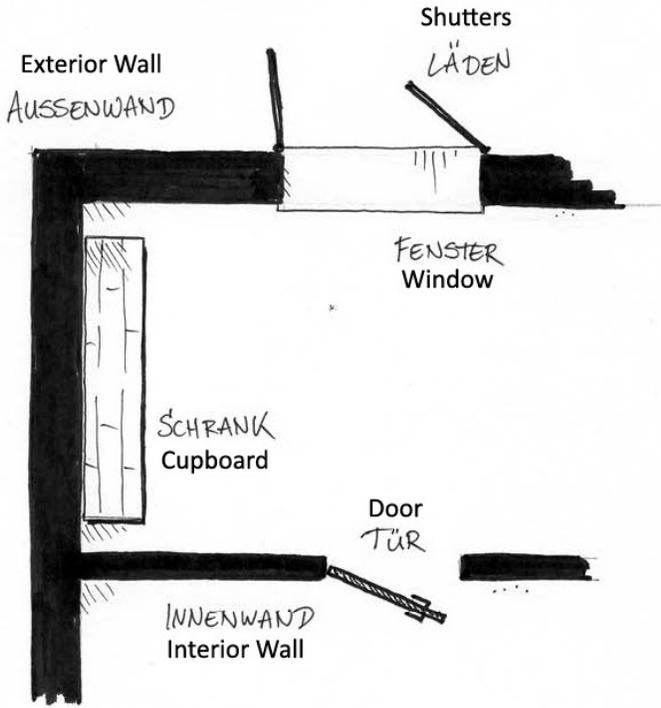
- © A **cultist hideout** by “T.O.”: A detailed two-story dungeon complete with furniture such as coffins and an altar in the sacrifice cave. The corridors clearly vary in their altitude and sometimes lead to dead ends. The main corridor to the big cave is lined with columns (a perfect covering for sneaking heroes).



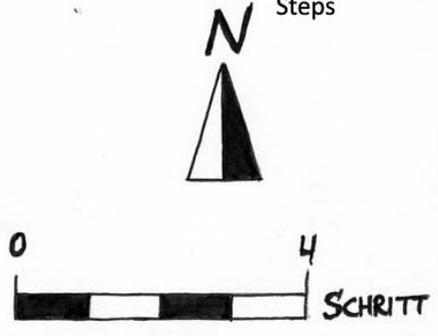
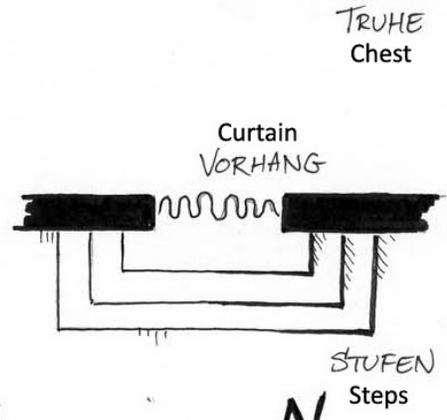
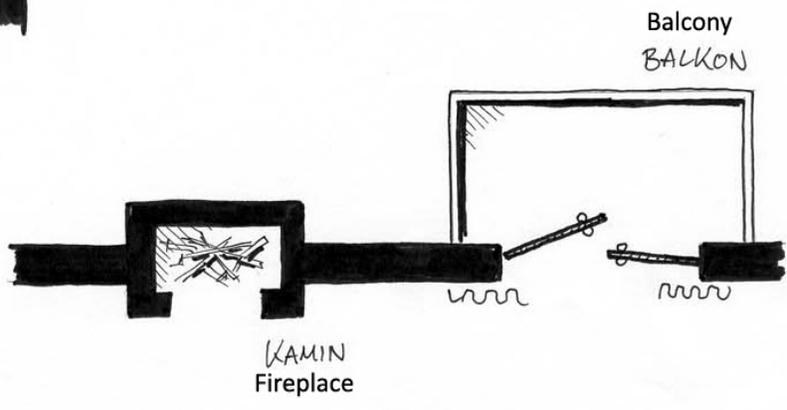
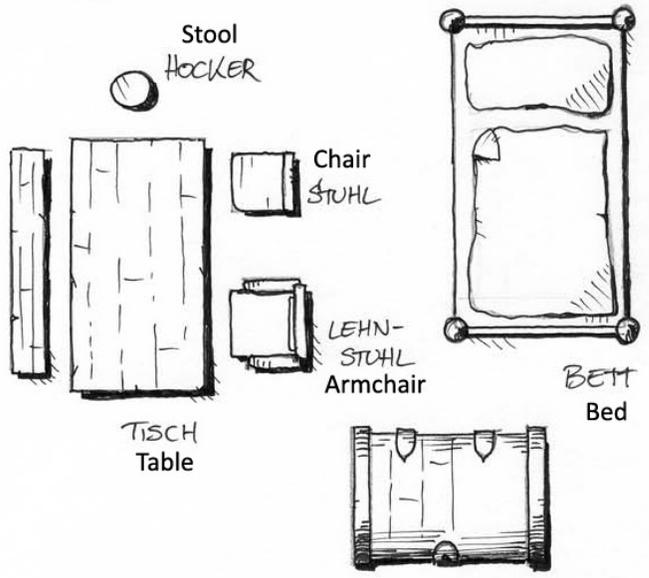
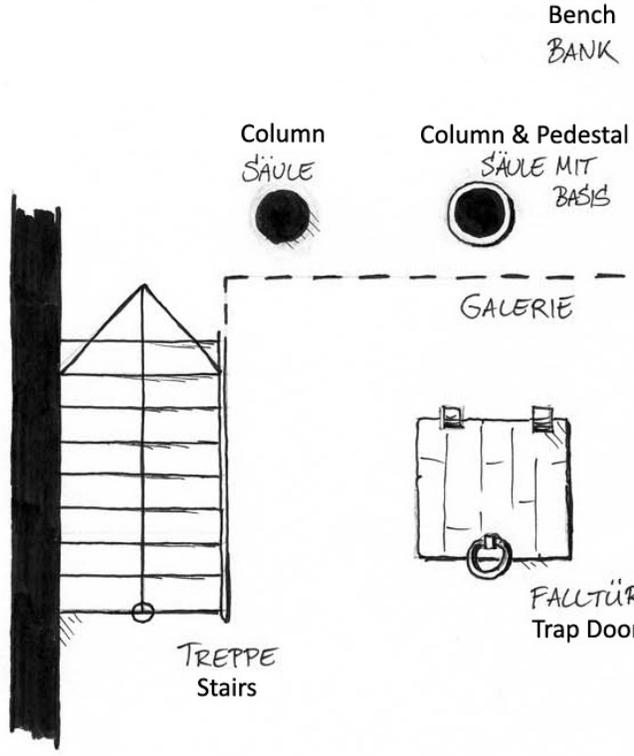
CONCLUSION

I had been very curious if and how many tips for drawing plans could be imparted within two hours. Since the feedback was entirely positive, I guess everyone was able to learn something for their own work. These two hours were a lot of fun, so I want to thank all attendees for their active participation.

And I hope that for all the others, this article provided them with some useful tips for their own plans.



DAUER TÜRSTREIFEN 206



SUMMARY

I. PLANNING YOUR MAP

This focuses mainly on making floor plans of buildings, dungeons and so on. But the same holds true for creating cities with only minor changes. When planning a map, make sure to both consider **world logic** and **dramaturgy**:

☉ LOGIC:

- **Location:** Where is your building? Inside a town or out in the wilderness? Is it surrounded by other houses, does it need strong walls to hold off threats?
- **Appearance:** Does its appearance change depending on the point of view (e.g., is it unimpressive when seen from the street, but pompous facing the garden?)
- **Walkways:** What are the main routes in your building? E.g. consider the ways house servants usually go- make them as short as possible and perhaps invisible to the visitor's eye.
- **Fireplace:** Where's the fireplace? It provides heat, but also takes away a lot of space and creates grime.
- **Secrets:** Are there any escape routes? Especially castles tend to have secret exits.
- **Rooms:** How are your rooms allocated? Living rooms should receive a lot of sunlight (facing south), rooms like the kitchen however can easily be placed facing north. In warm areas, sleeping rooms will also face north, or else nobody would be able to sleep at night.
- **Style:** What architectural style do you wish to emulate? Roman villa, small cottage, tree house?
- And many more...

☉ DRAMA:

- **Sights:** What are the heroes supposed to see /not to see when entering the building? How much are they to see on the outside?
- **Plot:** What is supposed to take place in this building? A fight, a party, a chase? What do you need for these events (big stairs, ballroom, library labyrinth)
- **Visibility:** Are there things that aren't visible to the eye (e.g. trap doors, secret rooms)? How can they be depicted? You might consider creating a map that doesn't reveal these secrets until the heroes actually discover them.

II. DRAWING TECHNIQUES

Jödemann names 6 important steps of creating a map:

1. **Information:** May be taken from existing descriptions or your own imagination. Plan your map according to the questions mentioned in “Planning your map”.
2. **Sketches:** Pencil and Paper are the only things required. Try to puzzle together all the gathered information and make sense of it.
3. **Preparatory drawing:** Especially important if you are working on a commission to give the requester a chance to adjust your plan to his ideas. Also works as a good first draft if you only work for yourself and want to take a first look at the whole map.
4. **Model:** Draw the map using pencil and paper. Since this is only a model you can make use of rulers, grids, guides, and of course your rubber. Special trick: Make it bigger than it actually has to be. That way minor blemishes will vanish once you reduce the map to the actual size.
5. **Actual Map:** Take layout paper and put it above your model. The pencil lines should be visible. Draw the actual map using finpens of varying size. Try to do without rulers this time, it adds to a vivid look of the map.
6. **Post-Editing:** Now scan the map grey-scale and do all the editing necessary – remove unwanted objects, place labels, add scales and so on.

iii. Tips

- ☞ **Copy:** Look how others solved the problem you're dealing with.
- ☞ **Material:** Use a pencil for the sketches and finepens for the actual drawing. A good start is three pens of varying thickness, for example 0,5mm, 0,3mm and 0,1mm.
- ☞ **Scale and North Arrow:** Don't forget them, they help your and the viewers' orientation.
- ☞ **Line Thickness:** Generally speaking, draw things close to the floor in thin lines, elevated things in medium lines and massive things like walls in thick lines.
- ☞ **Wall Thickness:** Basically there are three sizes of walls, namely exterior walls, bearing walls and interior walls, the latter being the thinnest.
- ☞ **Dungeons:** When drawing an underground dungeon, distinction between the hallway and the soil can be achieved by hachuring along the boundary line.
- ☞ **Architectural Symbols:** Try to avoid them unless you are sure everyone understands them. Very easily understandable symbols are arrows to show the direction of your stairs (start at the bottom and go to the top) or dashed lines to show things that are above the cutting level of your floor plan (such as trap doors in the ceiling).
- ☞ **Vividness:** Little details add to the look of a map, such as shading, implied grain on wood, implied floor tiles, pebbles lying about...